

Application No.: 09/996,707

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (currently amended) A vegetative produce handling machine, comprising:  
a vegetative produce receiver having a generally horizontal receiving surface and at least two opposing sides adjacent thereto to retain vegetative produce on the receiving surface;

a vegetative produce washer, adjacent the vegetative produce receiver, for washing the vegetative produce as it is transported therethrough;

a water absorber, adjacent said vegetative produce washer, for movably supporting the vegetative produce and to remove excess water from the vegetative produce as it exits the washer; and

a foam padding covering at least one stationary vegetative produce-contacting surface of the machine, wherein said foam padding is intended to reduce bruising of the vegetative produce and where said foam padding is formed with an anti-microbial agent to retard the growth of microbes within the padding.

2. (currently amended) The machine of claim 1, wherein said water absorber includes a plurality of donut-style rolls for supporting the vegetative produce and absorbing moisture therefrom, and where said rolls are manufactured from an open-cell foam that has anti-microbial properties.

3. (previously presented) The machine of claim 2, wherein the anti-microbial properties of the open-cell foam are achieved by adding an anti-microbial agent during the manufacture of the foam.

4. (currently amended) The machine of claim 3, wherein the open-cell foam is a latex foam suitable for operating in a moist environment.

5. (previously presented) The machine of claim 2, further comprising a plurality of wringer rolls, located in contact with the donut-style rolls, to compress the open-cell foam and thereby eliminate water attracted to surfaces within the open-cell foam.

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6. (currently amended) The machine of claim 1, wherein the foam padding covering at least one vegetative produce-contacting surface of the machine, is a closed-cell foam.

7. (currently amended) The machine of claim 1, wherein the foam padding covering at least one vegetative produce-contacting surface of the machine further includes a flexible outer layer of vinyl to reduce the absorption of moisture by the foam padding.

8. (currently amended) The machine of claim 7, wherein the flexible outer layer of vinyl is formed with an anti-microbial agent to retard the growth of microbes on moist exposed surfaces thereof.

9. (currently amended) The machine of claim 1, further comprising a roller inspection conveyor for transporting the vegetative produce while turning it for inspection, wherein the inspection conveyor includes a plurality of parallel conveyor rolls and where said conveyor rolls include at least an outer layer of foam having anti-microbial properties.

10. (original) The machine of claim 1, further comprising a sizer, wherein the sizer has at least one drop surface that is covered with padding and where the padding is produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

11. (original) The machine of claim 1, further comprising packing table wherein the packing table has at least one surface that is covered with padding and where the padding is produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

12. (original) The machine of claim 1, further comprising a drape produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

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13. (currently amended) The machine of claim 1, wherein said vegetative produce washer further comprises scrubber rubber produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

14. (currently amended) The machine of claim 1, further comprising a brush within the vegetative produce washer, wherein the brush has bristles produced with an anti-microbial agent to provide resistance to the growth of microbes thereon.

15. (currently amended) A vegetative produce handling machine, comprising:  
at least one stationary vegetative produce-contacting surface; and

a foam padding covering at least a portion of said stationary vegetative produce-contacting surface of the machine, wherein said foam padding is intended to reduce bruising of the vegetative produce contacting the stationary surface and where said foam padding is formed with an anti-microbial agent to retard the growth of microbes on the padding.

16. (currently amended) The vegetative produce handling machine of claim 15, wherein the foam padding is a closed-cell foam.

17. (original) The machine of claim 15, wherein the foam padding further includes a continuous yet flexible outer layer.

18. (currently amended) The machine of claim 17, wherein the flexible outer layer comprises a vinyl compound formed with an anti-microbial agent to retard the growth of microbes on surfaces coming in contact with the vegetative produce.

19. (original) The machine of claim 15, wherein said foam padding is molded to shape.

20. (canceled)

21. (canceled)

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22. (new) The machine of claim 1, wherein the anti-microbial agent is Tributyltin Maleate.

23. (new) The machine of claim 3, wherein the anti-microbial agent used in the open-cell foam of said donut-style rolls is Tributyltin Maleate.

24. (new) The machine of claim 1, wherein the anti-microbial agent is an antimicrobial compound, with an active ingredient of silver.

25. (new) The machine of claim 3, wherein the anti-microbial agent used in the open-cell foam of said donut-style rolls is an antimicrobial compound, with an active ingredient of silver.

26. (new) The machine of claim 1, wherein said foam padding is at least 0.125 inches thick.